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Administrative Appeal Decision - Zhang, Tian (2020-01-03)

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STATE OF NEW YORK – BOARD OF PAROLE

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL DECISION NOTICE

Name: Zhang, Tian

Facility: Otisville CF

NYSID: [REDACTED]

Appeal
Control No.: 04-090-19 B

DIN: 96-A-1365

Appearances: Orlee Goldfeld, Esq.
171 East Ridgewood Avenue, Suite 201
Ridgewood, New Jersey 07450

Decision appealed: March 2019 decision, denying discretionary release and imposing a hold of 24 months.

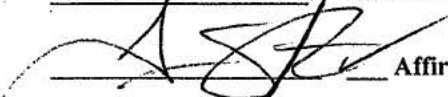
Board Member(s)
who participated: Davis, Cruse, Demosthenes

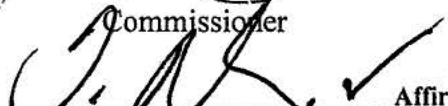
Papers considered: Appellant's Letter-brief received August 7, 2019

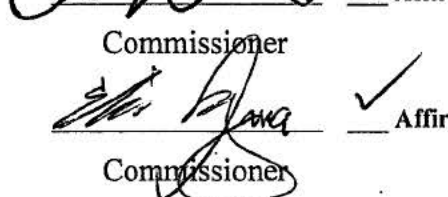
Appeals Unit Review: Statement of the Appeals Unit's Findings and Recommendation

Records relied upon: Pre-Sentence Investigation Report, Parole Board Report, Interview Transcript, Parole Board Release Decision Notice (Form 9026), COMPAS instrument, Offender Case Plan.

Final Determination: The undersigned determine that the decision appealed is hereby:

 Affirmed ☐ Vacated, remanded for de novo interview ☐ Modified to _____
Commissioner

 Affirmed ☒ Vacated, remanded for de novo interview ☐ Modified to _____
Commissioner

 Affirmed ☒ Vacated, remanded for de novo interview ☐ Modified to _____
Commissioner

If the Final Determination is at variance with Findings and Recommendation of Appeals Unit, written reasons for the Parole Board's determination must be annexed hereto.

This Final Determination, the related Statement of the Appeals Unit's Findings and the separate findings of the Parole Board, if any, were mailed to the Inmate and the Inmate's Counsel, if any, on 1/3/2020.
LB

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Appellant challenges the March 2019 determination of the Board, denying release and imposing a 24-month hold. The instant offense involved the appellant driving three other gang members to and from the robbery of a dental office, during which a dental assistant was fatally shot in the head. Appellant raises the following issues: 1) the Board's denial was made in violation of amended 9 NYCRR § 8002.2(a) because it failed to address its departure from the COMPAS scales; 2) the Board violated Appellant's due process rights; 3) the decision to deny parole is irrational bordering on impropriety because the decision is conclusory and based on the instant offense while ignoring information supporting release; and 4) the Board effectively resentenced Appellant. These arguments are without merit.

As an initial matter, discretionary release to parole is not to be granted "merely as a reward for good conduct or efficient performance of duties while confined but after considering if there is a reasonable probability that, if such inmate is released, he will live and remain at liberty without violating the law, **and** that his release is not incompatible with the welfare of society **and** will not so deprecate the seriousness of his crime as to undermine respect for the law." Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) (emphasis added); accord Matter of Hamilton v. New York State Div. of Parole, 119 A.D.3d 1268, 990 N.Y.S.2d 714 (3d Dept. 2014). Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) requires the Board to consider criteria which is relevant to the specific inmate, including, but not limited to, the inmate's institutional record and criminal behavior. People ex rel. Herbert v. New York State Bd. Of Parole, 97 A.D.2d 128, 468 N.Y.S.2d 881 (1st Dept. 1983).

While consideration of these factors is mandatory, "the ultimate decision to parole a prisoner is discretionary." Matter of Silmon v. Travis, 95 N.Y.2d 470, 477, 718 N.Y.S.2d 704, 708 (2000). Thus, it is well settled that the weight to be accorded the requisite factors is solely within the Board's discretion. See, e.g., Matter of Delacruz v. Annucci, 122 A.D.3d 1413, 997 N.Y.S.2d 872 (4th Dept. 2014); Matter of Hamilton, 119 A.D.3d at 1271, 990 N.Y.S.2d at 717; Matter of Garcia v. New York State Div. of Parole, 239 A.D.2d 235, 239, 657 N.Y.S.2d 415, 418 (1st Dept. 1997). The Board need not explicitly refer to each factor in its decision, nor give them equal weight. Matter of Betancourt v. Stanford, 148 A.D.3d 1497, 49 N.Y.S.3d 315 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of LeGeros v. New York State Bd. Of Parole, 139 A.D.3d 1068, 30 N.Y.S.3d 834 (2d Dept. 2016); Matter of Phillips v. Dennison, 41 A.D.3d 17, 21, 834 N.Y.S.2d 121, 124 (1st Dept. 2007). In the absence of a convincing demonstration that the Board did not consider the statutory factors, it must be presumed that the Board fulfilled its duty. Matter of Fuchino v. Herbert, 255 A.D.2d 914, 914, 680 N.Y.S.2d 389, 390 (4th Dept. 1998); Matter of McLain v. New York State Div. of Parole, 204 A.D.2d 456, 611 N.Y.S.2d 629 (2d Dept. 1994); Matter of McKee v. New York State Bd. Of Parole, 157 A.D.2d 944, 945, 550 N.Y.S.2d 204, 205 (3d Dept. 1990); People ex rel. Herbert, 97 A.D.2d 128, 468 N.Y.S.2d 881.

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The record as a whole, including the interview transcript, reflects that the Board considered the appropriate factors, including: the instant offense wherein Appellant drove the car to and from a robbery during which a woman was shot in the head and subsequently died from her injuries; a final deportation order to Hong Kong; Appellant's institutional efforts including a single disciplinary ticket from 2011, completion of Phase I of Transitional Services and ART, and work in maintenance; and release plans to live with his sister, or with his cousin if deported to Hong Kong. The Board also had before it and considered, among other things, Appellant's release package, the sentencing minutes, the case plan, the COMPAS instrument, and letters of support/assurance.

After considering all required factors, the Board acted within its discretion in determining release would not satisfy the standards provided for by Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A). In reaching its conclusion, the Board permissibly relied on instant offense. See Matter of Robinson v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 162 A.D.3d 1450, 81 N.Y.S.3d 235 (3d Dept. 2018); Matter of Jones v. New York State Dep't of Corr. & Cmty. Supervision, 151 A.D.3d 1622, 57 N.Y.S.3d 265 (4th Dept. 2017); Matter of King v. Stanford, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815 (3d Dept. 2016); Matter of Kirkpatrick v. Travis, 5 A.D.3d 385, 772 N.Y.S.2d 540 (2d Dept. 2004); Matter of Walker v. Travis, 252 A.D.2d 360, 676 N.Y.S.2d 52 (1st Dept. 1998); Matter of Betancourt v. Stanford, 148 A.D.3d 1497, 49 N.Y.S.3d 315 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of Bush v. Annucci, 148 A.D.3d 1392, 50 N.Y.S.3d 180 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of Marcus v. Alexander, 54 A.D.3d 476, 476, 862 N.Y.S.2d 414, 415 (3d Dept. 2008); Matter of Marcelin v. New York State Div. of Parole, 308 A.D.2d 616, 616-17, 764 N.Y.S.2d 361, 362 (3d Dept. 2003); Matter of Moore v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 274 A.D.2d 886, 712 N.Y.S.2d 179 (3d Dept. 2000), appeal dismissed, 95 N.Y.2d 958, 722 N.Y.S.2d 474 (2000), cert. denied, 532 U.S. 1026, 121 S. Ct. 1974 (2001).

The decision is consistent with amended 9 NYCRR § 8002.2(a) as there is no departure to explain. That is, the Board's decision was not impacted by a departure from a scale within the assessment. Notice of Adoption, NY Reg, Sept. 27, 2017 at 2. The Board concluded that, *despite* low risk scores, release would be inappropriate under the three statutory standards. This is entirely consistent with the Board's intention in enacting the amended regulation.

The 2011 amendments and 9 NYCRR § 8002.2(a) as amended do not represent a forward-looking shift requiring the COMPAS to be the fundamental basis for release decisions. This proposition is not supported by the language of the statute itself, considering the relatively modest change to Section 259-c(4) and the absence of any substantive change to Section 259-i(2), which governs the discretionary release consideration process. In 2011, the Executive Law was amended to require procedures incorporating risk and needs principles to "assist" the Board in making parole release decisions. Executive Law § 259-c(4). The Board satisfies this requirement in part by

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using the COMPAS instrument. Matter of Montane v. Evans, 116 A.D.3d 197, 202, 981 N.Y.S.2d 866, 870 (3d Dept. 2014); see also Matter of Hawthorne v. Stanford, 135 A.D.3d 1036, 1042, 22 N.Y.S.3d 640, 645 (3d Dept. 2016); Matter of LeGeros, 139 A.D.3d 1068, 30 N.Y.S.3d 834; Matter of Robles v. Fischer, 117 A.D.3d 1558, 1559, 985 N.Y.S.2d 386, 387 (4th Dept. 2014). However, the COMPAS is not predictive and was never intended to be the sole indicator of risk and needs as the Board gets risk and needs information from a variety of sources, including the statutory factors and the interview. Notably, the 2011 amendments did not eliminate the requirement that the Board conduct a case-by-case review of each inmate by considering the statutory factors, including the instant offense. Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A); Matter of Montane, 116 A.D.3d at 202, 981 N.Y.S.2d at 870. The amendments also did not change the three substantive standards that the Board is required to apply when deciding whether to grant parole. Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A). Thus, the COMPAS instrument cannot mandate a particular result. Matter of King, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815. Rather, the COMPAS is an additional consideration that the Board must weigh along with the statutory factors for the purposes of deciding whether all three statutory standards are satisfied. See Matter of Rivera v. N.Y. State Div. of Parole, 119 A.D.3d 1107, 1108, 990 N.Y.S.2d 295 (3d Dept. 2014); accord Matter of Dawes v. Annucci, 122 A.D.3d 1059, 994 N.Y.S.2d 747 (3d Dept. 2014); see also Matter of Gonzalvo v. Stanford, 153 A.D.3d 1021, 56 N.Y.S.3d 896 (3d Dept. 2017).

Amended 9 NYCRR § 8002.2(a) did not alter this approach. Notice of Adoption, NY Reg, Sept. 27, 2017 at 2 (reaffirming “any [risk and needs] instrument used is not dispositive”). Indeed, the COMPAS does not (and cannot) supersede the Board’s authority to determine, based on members’ independent judgment and application of section 259-i(2)(c)(A)’s factors, whether an inmate should be released. See 2011 N.Y. Laws ch. 62, § 1, part C, § 1, subpart A, § 1; Matter of Montane, 116 A.D.3d at 202, 981 N.Y.S.2d at 870. The amended regulation was intended to increase transparency in the Board’s decision making by providing an explanation if and when the Board departs from scales in denying an inmate release. Notice of Adoption, NY Reg, Sept. 27, 2017 at 2.

Appellant’s due process claim is without merit. An inmate has no Constitutional right to be conditionally released on parole before expiration of a valid sentence. Greenholtz v. Inmates of Nebraska Penal & Correctional Complex, 442 U.S. 1, 99 S. Ct. 2100, 2104 (1979); Matter of Russo v. Bd. of Parole, 50 N.Y.2d 69, 427 N.Y.S.2d 982 (1980); Matter of Vineski v. Travis, 244 A.D.2d 737, 664 N.Y.S.2d 391 (3d Dept. 1997). The New York State parole scheme “holds out no more than a possibility of parole” and thus does not create a protected liberty interest implicating the due process clause. Matter of Russo, 50 N.Y.2d at 75-76, 427 N.Y.S.2d at 985; see also Barna v. Travis, 239 F.3d 169, 171 (2d Cir. 2001); Matter of Freeman v. New York State Div. of Parole, 21 A.D.3d 1174, 800 N.Y.S.2d 797 (3d Dept. 2005).

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The Board's decision also satisfied the criteria set out in Executive Law § 259-i(2)(a), as it was sufficiently detailed to inform the inmate of the reasons for the denial of parole. Matter of Applegate v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 164 A.D.3d 996, 997, 82 N.Y.S.3d 240 (3d Dept. 2018); Matter of Kozlowski v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 108 A.D.3d 435, 968 N.Y.S.2d 87 (1st Dept. 2013); Matter of Little v. Travis, 15 A.D.3d 698, 788 N.Y.S.2d 628 (3d Dept. 2005); Matter of Davis v. Travis, 292 A.D.2d 742, 739 N.Y.S.2d 300 (3d Dept. 2002); People ex rel. Herbert v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 97 A.D.2d 128, 468 N.Y.S.2d 881 (1st Dept. 1983).

Appellant's assertion that the denial of parole release amounted to an improper resentencing is without merit inasmuch as the Board fulfilled its obligation to determine the propriety of release per Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) and after considering the factors set forth therein. Executive Law § 259 et seq.; Penal Law § 70.40; Matter of Murray v. Evans, 83 A.D.3d 1320, 920 N.Y.S.2d 745 (3d Dept. 2011); Matter of Crews v. New York State Exec. Dept. Bd. of Parole Appeals Unit, 281 A.D.2d 672, 720 N.Y.S.2d 855 (3d Dept. 2001). The Board was vested with discretion to determine whether release was appropriate notwithstanding the minimum period of incarceration set by the Court. Matter of Burress v. Dennison, 37 A.D.3d 930, 829 N.Y.S.2d 283 (3d Dept. 2007); Matter of Cody v. Dennison, 33 A.D.3d 1141, 1142, 822 N.Y.S.2d 677 (3d Dept. 2006), lv. denied, 8 N.Y.3d 802, 830 N.Y.S.2d 698 (2007). The appellant has not in any manner been resentenced. Matter of Mullins v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 136 A.D.3d 1141, 1142, 25 N.Y.S.3d 698 (3d Dept. 2016).

In conclusion, Appellant has failed to demonstrate the Board's decision was not made in accordance with the pertinent statutory requirements or was irrational "bordering on impropriety." Matter of Silmon v. Travis, 95 N.Y.2d 470, 476, 718 N.Y.S.2d 704 (2000) (quoting Matter of Russo v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 50 N.Y.2d 69, 427 N.Y.S.2d 982 (1980)).

Recommendation: Affirm.